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ECCLESIASTICAL ESTABLISHMENTS

NOT INCONSISTENT

WITH

CHRISTIANITY:

WITH A

PARTICULAR VIEW

TO SOME

LEADING OBJECTIONS OF THE MODERN DISSENTERS.

---

BY

WILLIAM HULL.

---

Eheu,

Quam temerè in nosmet legem sancinus iniquam,

Nam vitilis nemo sine nascitur.

HOR.

Καὶ ἀπολαύουσιν ἐλάχιστα τῶν ὑπαρχόντων, διὰ τὸ ὑεὶ κτᾶσθαι.—THUCYD.

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## PREFACE.

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QUESTIONS relating to the Church of England are, at this time, of paramount importance. They occupy, and almost absorb, the public mind. Nor does it become an Englishman to apologise for taking a part, however humble, in discussions which are equally interesting to all men of all parties.

In the present eventful crisis, when a mysterious persuasion is gone forth that we stand on the brink of mighty revolutions, and when the prophets of desolation are labouring to realize their own predictions, it becomes every man to choose his side *on broad principles*; merging secondary points, as more fit to be debated when the greater interests are no longer in jeopardy.

As an Englishman and as a Christian, the Author has come to the deliberate conclusion, that it is his duty to make common cause with the advocates

of the Church, in opposition to those who are seeking to destroy. The Reader of these pages will learn some of the considerations which have dictated this decision, and will judge for himself how far they are sound.

Interested prejudices, not to be reconciled with moral integrity; want of knowledge, or want of sense; a mind obscured and depraved by worldly attachments, and disqualified for a just appreciation of spiritual religion; these are the causes by which Dissenters explain the conduct of every man who professes to reverence the Established Church. In the face of these illiberal and intolerant allegations, the following pages are respectfully, but fearlessly, presented to the Public. They contain the views and convictions of an individual who has always studied to preserve a mind open to impressions of truth; who has no party interests to serve, no sectarian passions to indulge, no ecclesiastical preferment to obtain by avowing them, and who has been placed in circumstances more than usually favourable for forming an unbiassed estimate of the men and the principles of different religious denominations. His convictions have been slowly, but irresistibly, forced upon him.



In the course of this work, an unqualified opinion is expressed, which recent transactions have proved to be unwarranted, of the loyalty of Dissenters to the law. Their refusal, in various instances, to pay the Church rates, when legally demanded, must be matter of grief to every man who has at heart the peace of the country.

Such conduct proceeds on a principle subversive of all government, and is the first step towards rebellion and anarchy. It assumes the right of individuals to resist the authority of the Legislature in any particular instance in which selfishness, caprice, or faction, may choose to cover their enormities under the sacred plea of conscience. In the present case, it is difficult to see in what sense conscience can justify the resistance of a *particular* body to the will of the public, expressed by the constitutional authorities of the kingdom. The object to be obtained is trivial, on all sound principles of moral casuistry, compared with the pernicious influence of this example of revolt set by persons professing superior sanctity, and who are supposed by the restless multitude to be not ignorant of moral obligations.

The particular crisis selected for this and similar displays of radical dissenterism, brands them



as the ebullitions of a spirit essentially ungenerous and ignoble—nor is it difficult to determine, with what justice men lay claim to a purer faith or a loftier patriotism than their neighbours, whose leading characteristic it is, that they “despise dominion and speak evil of dignities.”

The signs of the times are not to be mistaken. The adversaries of peace and of concord are no longer employed secretly in whetting the sword and polishing their armour. The assault is determined. A short time will discover whether the crisis shall be fatal or triumphant, for “our Laws—our Liberties—and our Religion.”

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# ECCLESIASTICAL ESTABLISHMENTS

NOT INCONSISTENT

WITH

## CHRISTIANITY.

---

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

STATE OF THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THE CHURCH  
AND THE DISSENTERS.

THE tendency of theological controversies, when long protracted, is to widen the distance between conflicting parties. The disputed points are multiplied as successive combatants make their appearance in the field. By the formation and consolidation of sects, new interests are created, and with them new jealousies: and when time and reflection, and the monitory voice of Providence, calling the disputants to their final account, ought to produce concession or reconciliation, there are never wanting individuals or classes and orders of men, actuated by sinister motives or by erroneous views of duty, to transmit the strife from one generation to another, with all the angry passions which have been

kindled in its progress. Hence the dissenters have been driven, at last, to avow principles which interpose an unpassable gulf between themselves and the Church, and have thus appropriated to their party the honour or the guilt of effecting an interminable separation.

The original grounds of the schism might have ceased to exist, had there been on neither side a spirit of unrelenting hostility. They related either to particular forms or phrases or points of discipline, which might have been altered to the satisfaction of all; or, they concerned chiefly the rights of private judgment, which are no longer invaded any more by the Church than by the dissenters, since the principles of toleration have been fully recognised. But the great body of the dissenters, more than ever alienated, have agreed to occupy a position which supersedes, so long as they maintain it, all possibility of their return to the bosom of the Church, engages them to a war of extermination, and which, by a necessary consequence, renders it almost hopeless for the Church to make any advances towards a system of wide and generous comprehension.

— Dissenters now object to establishments, not in detail, but in the gross. They proclaim the Church of England to be fundamentally and irremediably corrupt; not simply useless, but vicious; “destroying more souls than it saves;” a legitimate object of contempt and execration to all men who reve-



rence Christianity, and are concerned for its final triumph over error, guilt, and human misery. Their children are disciplined from their infancy, sworn, as it were on the domestic altar, to eternal hatred of the Church and renunciation of her fellowship. The spirit of kindness, breathed by Doddridge and even by Towgood, is extinct. They cease to lament that scruples of conscience on their own part, or any reluctance on the part of the Church to concede in matters of indifference, should be a bar to their communion. Such sentiments are discarded. It is become an incorporated article of their creed, "part and parcel" of their religion, to reject the Church as something profane, and they attempt her overthrow by enlisting the better feelings, the more sacred passions, of the good on the side of disorder and revolution. A fierce and ruthless warfare is commenced. *Delenda est Carthago!*

The expression of this bitter feeling has not been confined to secret whispers, or to the fireside conversation. Their ordination sermons, their polemical tracts and pamphlets, their more elaborate productions, are instinct with the furor of fanatical hostility. Nor is it confined to individuals who may be supposed to have in view some low and interested ends, to men who aim at notoriety by extravagance, and who would sacrifice principle to an unworthy popularity. Opinions are propagated by association and by sympathy. Good ministers of undoubted sincerity of intention have caught the



infection, and are in their turn spreading it around them.

By one, we are deliberately told that, on the principles of modern dissenters, "a state establishment of Christianity must be a crying abomination, a daring encroachment on the prerogatives of Heaven."

Another affirms, that "if a Church the greatest and best that ever existed; if a Church distinguished by the purity of her doctrine, the sanctity of her discipline, the apostolic splendour and devotedness of her ministry; if a Church unrivalled for the glory of her various institutions, were this day established, we should remain, what we now are, *conscientious dissenters*."

A third exclaims, "As to actually conforming—leaving the meeting-house for the Church—to any dissenter who understands his principles or respects himself, the proposition is absurd, almost ridiculous."

A fourth asks, with ineffable meekness and candour, "What instances are there of men distinguished for ability and piety, zeal and usefulness, brought up and thoroughly initiated in the principles of dissent, and of religious liberty, surrendering themselves up to a diocesan, and joining in the pomp and ceremony of a national religion, founded or annihilated by Act of Parliament?"

It is needless to cite more intemperate and virulent language from the publications of the Society

for promoting "Ecclesiastical Knowledge," a society whose departure from the spirit of Christianity and violation of the courtesies which are due to the great mass of their countrymen attached to the Church of England, have offended some of the more respectable, but equally decided, advocates of non-conformity.

In accordance with the tone of feeling now pervading the general body of orthodox dissenters, who make their dissent a prime article of their religious faith and duty, an attempt has been made to seduce the party in the Church, esteemed by them most religious and thought to have the nearest affinity to themselves, to desert their post, resign their preferments, and join, in a grand and imposing secession, the adversaries of the Church. What follows is the language of temptation, or of insult.

"The evangelical clergy are now a considerable body; they include in their number some connected with the higher classes; several of them are distinguished by superior talents; and all have enjoyed, and many have improved, the immense advantages of thorough education. As a body, whatever may be thought of their theological attainments, systematically considered, they are unquestionably distinguished, in general, by fervent and unaffected piety, great simplicity of motive, and eminent purity of life. From their situation, as connected with the Establishment, they possess a sort of *accidental* s . . . . . the ministers of other sects ;



their movements would therefore be more observed, whether intrinsically more deserving of observation or not. They might produce, from this circumstance, an effect upon the nation, and especially upon the higher classes, which the movements and the ministers of no other denomination could produce. Suppose then that these men in a body, or in very large numbers, should give a practical proof of their devotion to God, by separating from the establishment, condemning the evils by which their Church is at present defiled, and lifting up their voice against the 'alliance' that occasions them; supposing them to keep together, still in love with some of their institutions, and to present a picture of episcopacy without its pomp, and of the discipline of their Church without its corruptions; I cannot but consider that the attention of thousands would be drawn to the subject of religion who are now invulnerable to every attack; who are shielded by the panoply of their rank, their education, and their habits, their pharisaical pride or their infidel indifference."

The party designated evangelical cannot be deceived by this palpable attempt to "divide and conquer;" they will detect the cloven foot. Regarding, as they do in common with all good men, the promotion of true religion, in its higher and more spiritual bearings, as a matter infinitely more important than any external forms of communion, of worship, or of ecclesiastical discipline; it is still

underrating their sobriety and caution to expect that they should be deluded by this ambiguous appeal to their piety. They will naturally ask, not simply what will be the momentary results of this mighty and simultaneous movement, but what its more remote and permanent effects on the flocks they desert, and on that sacred and ancient institution, which, with all its defects, they value and revere, as being eminently subservient to the interests of true godliness, the spiritual edification of the faithful, and to all that is most dear to human nature and to their country. They will not forget that in taking part in the proposed secession, they retire from a field of substantial usefulness and honourable labour, in search of some *terra incognita*, with no other reward, perhaps, than the bitterness of disappointment, aggravated by the consciousness of egregious and precipitate folly; while they will be excluded, by their own act, from aiding in future the salutary reforms which shall strengthen and perpetuate the Church. They will remember that the proposal comes from an adversary, who proves by his way of writing that he would rejoice to see the mitre trodden in the dust, and to whom no spectacle would be more refreshing than such "a picture of episcopacy" as the seceders would present—not a scattered and broken flock, but a multitude of shepherds without flocks, dispersed throughout the empire, wandering in poverty and idleness. As it would be too much to expect that



their congregations should secede with the protesting pastors, the latter would only realize, most ridiculously, the personage so familiar to nursery maids and children, under the name of "Jack O'Noddy, *all head and no body.*"

The ground now taken by the leaders of the dissenting interest, while it gives to the controversy a more solemn aspect, as one that excludes all hope of amicable compromise, has this advantage, that it narrows the question, simplifies the dispute, and renders it more easy for every individual to choose his side without perplexity or hesitation. The enemies of the Church have proclaimed that parley and truce and neutrality are at end; the friends of the Church therefore know their duty.

Is an Establishment lawful or is it not? Is it in accordance with the genius of Christianity, or is its tendency in every instance to corrupt the purity of religion? If it be unlawful, it is superfluous to object to any minor evils which may attach to a particular Establishment. Let it be at once subverted, with all its accompaniments, and consigned to perpetual destruction. If it be lawful, then, so long as there is nothing *fundamentally* wrong in its doctrines, its worship, or its general administration, nothing to render correction and improvement hopeless, the point of conscience is manifestly not to secede and then protest, but to remain and aid its efficiency, guard against its abuse, employ an active but prudent influence for perfecting its in-

stitutions, and for keeping it in tone with the progress of society and the exigencies of the times.

If we withdraw from every association, every institution, that has even great and glaring defects, we must abandon altogether human intercourse, and erect for ourselves a solitary altar in the desert. No Church, no sect, is faultless. The Church of England has defects peculiarly her own, marked and obvious, and in keeping with the extent and grandeur of this monument of ancient piety. But no dissenting community has fewer, nor are these less pernicious in their kind. They may indeed be less subject to observation, as the defects or inconveniences of a barn attract little attention, compared with the inroads of time or the violence of man, marring the symmetry of a venerable and majestic temple.

The dissenters have changed their position, and concentrated their forces upon one point of attack. They will eventually take nothing by this move. Their eager ingenuity will defeat itself. Specific grievances, partial wrongs, will always be found to exist, and these may sometimes be magnified by malice or bigotry, operating on a weak conscience, into justifiable grounds of separation. But if the Dissenters break down in their main argument—if the *principle* of an Establishment be proved not to be inimical to the spirit or the objects of the Gospel—they lose their cause entirely with persons of calm reflection, since little heed will henceforth be given



to minor objections urged in the spirit of frivolous complaint. These may be grounds of inquiry and amendment, but not necessarily of separation. It will then be felt that no man needs to abjure the Church, unless on the score of caprice or educational prejudice, but those who differ in what are deemed essentials. To say the least, it will appear that they who dissent, are no more bound to seek the overthrow of the Establishment, as a matter of conscience, than any one sect of non-conformists is in duty bound to seek the destruction of every other sect. A man may prefer for himself the worship of the meeting-house, yet think on the whole that an Establishment is a national blessing. The hour is come for all such to avow themselves.

It is the design of this short treatise, to examine the most weighty objections brought forward by dissenters against the *principle* of a Religious Establishment, with a special reference to the Church of England.

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#### SECTION I.

ON THE SUPPOSED INCONSISTENCY OF A RELIGIOUS  
ESTABLISHMENT WITH THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE  
KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

“The argument upon this subject is very clear, and lies in a very narrow compass. Jesus Christ is the sole law-giver in his Church. He said, ‘*My*

*kingdom is not of this world.* It was to be distinct and separate. Whoever then attempts to connect his kingdom, or Church, with the State, or with the honours, the dignities, and emoluments of this world, whatever may be the pretence, makes it a worldly sanctuary, and disobeys the will of the law-giver." These are reported in "Green's Reminiscences," to be the words of Mr. Hall. It is usual with Dissenters to quote this text with the same application, and in the same summary and dogmatical way, as conclusive in favour of their cause. Their interpretation, however, of the text may be fallacious, and their triumph without foundation. To put the matter in its true light, it will be well to inquire into the original bearing of this particular passage, and into what ought to be understood, in correctness of meaning, by the spirituality of the Christian Church.

Judæa, at the time of our Lord's ministry, and trial, and crucifixion, was under the dominion of the Romans. As a conquered province, it was subjected to the rule of a Roman governor. With the Roman authorities rested, exclusively, the power of life and death. The Jewish tribunals were not competent to decide in capital cases, nor to carry into execution the extreme sentence of the law. Having therefore resolved on the destruction of Jesus, his enemies aimed at the accomplishment of their purpose, by rendering him an object of suspicion and of political jealousy to the Romans. By



stealthy insinuation, or by direct crimination, they charged him with aspiring to the sovereignty of the country, and consequently with plotting the overthrow of the existing power. Pilate questioned our Lord on this point, and his reply is made in words, which contain, the Dissenters affirm, a damnatory sentence against all religious establishments. "My kingdom is not of this world : if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews :—but now is my kingdom not from hence." *John* xviii. 36.

In interpreting this language, we are to bear in mind that it contains a defence against a particular charge—that it is intended to meet and repel that charge—and, consequently, that we are to look for something appropriate and relevant to the capital point, and to the peculiar circumstances of the case. We are to divest ourselves for a moment of all preconceived notions of ecclesiastical polity, and, instead of approaching the subject as polemics of the nineteenth century, we are to put that construction on the defence of our Lord, which, we might suppose, a member of the legal profession would put, or a grave juryman, if we forget the anachronism, and imagine, for the sake of argument, such a person to have listened to the prisoner.

Now, the first and most obvious impression would be, that the person arraigned calmly and deliberately disavowed the purpose of aiming at the political sovereignty of his country, and protested

against the charge of revolt or usurpation. Not an individual, at that hour present in the judgment-hall, from the president of the tribunal to the most humble officer of the court, would associate the idea of ecclesiastical establishments with a single syllable that proceeded from the lips of the prisoner. He was not standing there on the accusation of aiming to set up a state-religion, in conjunction with the chiefs of his own country, or with the magnates of imperial Rome. His reply did not contemplate that allegation. To imagine that our Lord had it in view to obviate such an impression, when he said, "*My kingdom is not of this world*," is an extravagance into which none could fall, but men heated and blinded by the pernicious rage of party.

Still, our Lord admits that he is a king. The point blank question of Pilate precluded his holding silence on that subject, unless he had tacitly disowned his real dignity. Although, therefore, he made no direct or intended allusion to ecclesiastical establishments, it is a fair question for discussion, whether, on that occasion, our Lord's defence contained a statement, *indirectly* condemning all such institutions. The following remarks may serve to free the subject from perplexity.

1. It is not clear that the phrase "*not of this world*" was designed by our Lord to bear a meaning so comprehensive as to include more than the Judæan territory and government. The word rendered "*world*" is given by Schleusner as sometimes



used with an equally limited construction.<sup>1</sup> All, therefore, that our Lord designed to say might be simply this—"My kingdom is not the political sovereignty of Judæa,"—an interpretation strongly countenanced by what immediately follows, "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight;" that is, "If my ambition had been directed to political power, I should have levied forces, armed my followers, adopted the measures of a political chieftain, and thus secured myself from the malice of the Jews, my accusers, instead of voluntarily submitting to stand before this tribunal, a solitary and deserted captive. My presence here is my vindication; it proves that my dominion does not rest on the suffrages or martial prowess of this people. It is not the political sovereignty of *my country*, but a kingdom, which, however mysterious it may seem, is not inconsistent with the humiliation and the sorrows of the victim who stands before you."

Supposing this to be the correct, as it is the most natural view of our Lord's statement, it follows that no specific information is conveyed by it in relation to the particular attributes of his own kingdom. It merely asserts that he claims the majesty of dominion, while he disowns the ambition and the projects of a political leader in his native land. By

<sup>1</sup> *Incolæ mundi, humanum genus, ceu omne, ceu certum.*—SCAPULA.

no subtilty of invention, no power of criticism, can the words be made to bear, of *necessity*, a more ample meaning in this place. But,

2. For the sake of fully and fairly meeting the question, we will assume that our Lord designed to particularize his own kingdom as not being in any sense a secular dominion; is there, on that score, any justness in the conclusion that religion is not to be patronized by the state, in any country professing the faith of the cross?

For the solution of this question, we must institute a previous inquiry. What did our Lord mean by his "*kingdom*?" a point seldom, if ever, adverted to in this controversy. Confused notions here will lead us into interminable difficulties and appalling conclusions. Correct ideas will teach us to regard the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom as being *not inconsistent* with the employment of worldly or secular means for the support and extension of his visible Church.

The sacred writers, be it observed, in terms which no fair and rational criticism can explain away, have given their concurrent testimony to the dominion of Christ over the universe, including the entire course of Providence, and all the arrangements of the Divine administration which affect the interests of individuals and of nations. "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in the earth, visible



and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers : all things were created by him and for him : and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." In addition to this ascription of universal supremacy, and as forming a distinct article of our faith, we are assured that "He is the head of the body, THE CHURCH," *Coloss. i. 15—19.*

This enumeration is remarkable. The latter part is manifestly included in the former, as all particulars are summed up and contained in universals. But the distinct enumeration of "*the Church*" was designed, in the first place, probably, to obviate the possibility of explaining away the universal majesty of the Redeemer's dominion as Lord of Heaven and of Earth, as Socinians attempt to do, when they interpret the whole of this description as simply figurative of the authority of Christ in his *Church*. In the next place, to impress us with such deep persuasion of the particular relation in which he stands to his faithful people as shall fill us not less with consolatory assurance of his grace than with reverence of his illimitable grandeur.

Take either view of the subject. In both instances it may be affirmed that his kingdom is *not of this world*—in neither does the doctrine militate against an established church.

In regard to the first, the case is almost too plain to require argument. The majesty of Christ, as Lord of the creation, cannot be "*of this world.*"

His sovereignty cannot originate in systems of human polity, nor be dependent on the counsels or the arms of mortals, who have sprung from his energy, and are subject to an administration to which all the movements, mechanical or spontaneous, of this mysterious world are entirely subordinate. He is Lord of all !—But what direct bearing has this stupendous view of the majesty of Christ on the question of the external administration, the discipline and polity of the Christian Church ?

Or, consider him as having in view the spiritual dominion which he came to establish among men, and which is designated, by way of distinction, as being specially connected with the support of the moral government of the Deity—“ the kingdom of heaven,” and “ the reign of God.”—This *is not of this world*. “ It cometh not with observation.” It is a moral dominion—it is the establishment of the divine authority in the human breast—it is the subjection of the understanding to the revelations of divine truth, the surrender of the heart to the love of God, the conformity of the soul in its moral sentiments to the laws of eternal righteousness. It *is not of this world*, since the truth and the grace which form the Christian character—the character which constitutes the Christian a member of the heavenly kingdom—come to us from above, and are the gift of heaven. But what bearing has this on the question before us, since the spiritual worship of the true Christian may be performed



with equal sincerity in a cathedral or in a cottage—and the dominion of Christ may exist with all its hallowing influences, not less certainly in conjunction with the lawn, the ermine, or the purple, than with the garb of a methodist or a friend.

If there are duties prescribed in the New Testament to be observed in the social performance of Divine worship—rules to direct the external fellowship of saints—these are such as may be performed with equal advantage under any and every form of ecclesiastical polity. There is nothing in the nature of an Establishment necessarily opposed to the performance of these duties. True, an Establishment may be corrupt, and so may a congregational Church. But we are not now discussing partial evils affecting particular societies. We are now on the general question. Examine the precepts which relate to the Christian Sacraments, or to the regulation of Christian worship. There are none, excepting local and temporary appointments, but such as may be observed under any modification of Church polity—a fact worthy to be remarked by all who insist on the divine right of any one mode of Church government.

In point of fact, if our Lord had in view the Christian Church, his allusion to it must have been confined to his moral dominion over the principles and hearts of his followers—not extending to the external discipline of the visible Church, to the means of its propagation, or the maintenance of

its public worship. The reason is plain. These are matters necessarily mixed up with secular considerations. From whatever sources the funds are derived which provide for the support of the Christian ministry and worship, these funds are *of this world*. There is nothing spiritual in silver or gold, nor even in the copper pence which are wrung in driblets, by weekly collections, from the pockets of the poor, in some dissenting congregations, to keep their ministers from absolute starvation. Whether the worship of God is held up by voluntary contributions or by endowments, the munificent gifts of other generations, or by a direct tax levied by the state—in either case, the proceeds are *of this world*. And not even the mighty mind of Hall, can shelter him from the charge of uttering sheer nonsense, when he affirms that “to connect the emoluments of this world with the Christian Church, is to make it a worldly sanctuary.” The legitimate conclusion from such a statement would be, that the labourer in the Lord’s vineyard is not worthy of his hire, and that they who “sow spiritual things,” are *not* “to reap carnal.”—And, judging from the poverty and embarrassments of most dissenting ministers, together with the frequent allusions to this afflicting subject in their Magazines, and other publications, we may believe that the dissenters are rapidly advancing towards that *practical* conclusion.

These egregious blunders have their origin in



confused notions of the spirituality of the Redeemer's kingdom. Men will not distinguish between things perfectly distinct, the spiritual dominion of God in the heart, and the external discipline of the collective body of the professors of Christianity, associated in different communions, and submitting, according to their several apprehensions of the path of duty, to the laws and ordinances of Jesus Christ. The first is purely spiritual. It is that which no worldly arrangements can produce—no secular power establish—no silver or gold purchase. It is not in meat and drink, but “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”—Acts of Parliament may prescribe the observance of external rites, or provide the funds for religious instruction—but they cannot purify the conscience, nor regenerate the soul. But no absurdity can be greater than to apply the principles and reasonings, which are correct in reference to the spiritual dominion of the heart, in individuals, to the collective body of the professors of Christianity, and their acts of outward worship.

In no existing sects, are the professors of Christianity exclusively and purely spiritual. Nor, are their forms of worship and modes of supporting religion; in conducting which, the good and the evil, the false and the true believer, are mingled together in the performance of common duties. All sects, which have pretended to confine their communion to the really faithful, and to conduct their

ecclesiastical affairs entirely by spiritual agents for spiritual ends, have failed in their Utopian project. They have no infallible criterion to employ as a test of character, to distinguish between mere profession and sincere piety, and thus to anticipate the judgment of the last day. Nor do they refuse the contributions of persons, confessedly regarded by themselves as irreligious, when their worship and their ministers are to be maintained. Nothing is more common, than for men not "of good report," even with the world, to take the lead in these professedly puritanical assemblies. Individuals, who esteem themselves, and are regarded by others, as being eminently spiritual, are seen to employ means as eminently secular, for advancing the sectarian interests of their party. If the world is ever uppermost in the minds of men—if passions unfriendly to the religious repose of the heart, are ever roused into turbulent agitation, it is amidst the maddening scenes of a contested election. Yet, in this element of the earthly-minded do we behold the dissenting pastor, decked with the ribands of his party, busy in the canvass, and conspicuous on the hustings. What is his apology? That the interests of civil and religious liberty are inseparately blended, and that true piety can make its way in the world only under the auspices of freedom. Thus they profess principles, which themselves are among the first to violate.

Their error lies in making that essential which,



in fact, is impracticable. The external church, the visible kingdom of Christ, is a net, containing all manner of fishes—a field, in which tares and wheat grow together. The day of separation is reserved for the introduction of a higher economy. In the mean time, it is foolish and hurtful to apply to religious establishments, objections, which may be advanced with equal force against every external communion, and with no real propriety against any. The present is a mixed condition of persons. The Church and the world cannot be entirely disjoined. The “alliance” between what is spiritual and what is secular, exists in the most obscure of Independent, or Baptist, or Methodist Churches. To imagine the contrary possible, is not less irrational, than to suppose that we can attain to a purely spiritual state of being before we have put off “these tabernacles.” But the good people who form these societies, have the happy faculty of seeing nothing but what is spiritual within their own narrow fences.

— The secular man and his purse are sanctified, the moment he repeats the Shibboleth and is enrolled of the party. Neither his doubtful principles, nor his ambiguous morals, nor his sanctimonious conceit, nor the slander of his uncharitable tongue, nor his silver, nor his gold, are *of this world!*

If by the spirituality of the Church, we mean, as we ought, the sincere goodness of the true disciple of Christ,—it will probably be found that the Church of England does not contain less of this, in

proportion, than any of the rival sects which seek her subversion. As regards the means, moreover, which she employs for upholding her worship, she is, at least, not below the level of her adversaries, who suffer persons to regulate their concerns, who are not more sacred than the bench of Bishops—and whose money is not more super-mundane than the King's taxes.

In point of fact, Churchmen would seem to have more exalted conceptions of the spirituality of religion than dissenters. The former admit that an Establishment is no intrinsic part of Christianity, but only a means for its inculcation, and to secure the due administration of its ordinances. The latter make the external modes and forms an integral portion of religion, confounding them with what is inward and spiritual. Hence to be a member of a dissenting Church, is now identified with making a profession of "*religion*"—and to fall in with the peculiarities of a sect, setting a useful example of zeal and precision in the prescribed routine of duties, is to secure the reputation of "*eminent piety*."—To be an avowed member of the Church of England, it seems, is to make *no* "profession of religion!" The liberality and the spirituality of dissenters appear, in this instance, in remarkable accordance with each other.



## SECTION II.

AN ESTABLISHMENT NOT NECESSARILY OPPOSED TO  
THE RIGHTS OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

The rights of conscience are sacred : they will be surrendered by no man who knows what is due to the majesty of truth, to the dignity of his intellectual and moral nature, to his individual responsibility, and to the warning voice of God. The cause of Protestantism is founded on these rights, and is maintained by their assertion. Their wilful violation is the most enormous crime which tyranny can be guilty of—the most flagrant injustice which can be perpetrated against man. In Spain, in Portugal, in Italy, in Austria, in all countries which remain under the deadly sway of the Roman Church, these rights are trampled upon with reckless indignity, and humanity is outraged in its dearest, noblest, most holy interests. The day of retribution will come ! The principles of religious liberty are but partially understood in many Protestant states. The chain of bondage has been loosened, but not burst asunder. The worship of dissenters is tolerated, while they are denied the liberty of publicly discussing and propagating their own faith. Nations are slow to learn the principles of a just and tempered freedom, and governments are still more slow to act upon them. Time was, when, in this country, the subject was imperfectly

apprehended ; and perhaps, after all, the liberties of Englishmen are to be traced rather to the resolute endurance of the victims of persecution than to the cordial admission, by the ruling powers, of the doctrines of Locke, and of the writers who have espoused the same enlightened and manly views. It is matter of notoriety that during the struggles which ended in the temporary overthrow of the monarchy and the Church, the conflict lay chiefly between parties who fought, not for liberty, but for ascendancy. The Church was not alone in the sin of imposition. The Presbyterians denounced the practice of toleration as a criminal indulgence granted to impiety, a traitorous compromise with the powers of darkness. The Independents, whose notions were more purely democratical, would tolerate every thing besides, but withheld their charity or their justice from the Church as by law established.

More enlarged views began to prevail after the re-establishment of public tranquillity, which followed the restoration. The best and wisest men of every Protestant party regarded each other with sentiments of charity, did justice to each other's integrity of principle, and aimed to bring about a comprehension by reciprocal concessions. Other counsels prevailed. The violence of party attached a stigma to all dissenters, whose separation from the Church was rendered inevitable, and then punished by civil disabilities. Their loyalty was sup-



posed to be tainted.<sup>1</sup> They were treated as persons unworthy to serve their country in offices of trust or power under the Crown. In this state of things, it was manly, it was noble, to dissent. There was no alternative for an honourable man. It was the straight forward way of protesting against the abuse of power, and of claiming the right of British subjects to obey conscience in things sacred, without

<sup>1</sup> The author is aware that these points are gravely and earnestly debated, even at the present time. The consequences of that awful convulsion are still felt, and the passions then awakened, and since perpetuated, continue to interfere with the calm decisions of the judgment. No individual has brought to the discussion of disputed matters, in our ecclesiastical history, a mind more serene, more dispassionate, more comprehensive and erudite, than Dr. Southey. The ninth chapter of the first volume of the *Life of Wesley*, "On the state of religion in England," is an incomparable dissertation, containing an outline of the history of the Church of England, and of the relations subsisting between the Church and the separatists in successive periods. The merits of this most illustrious of living writers are attested by the deep and rancorous hatred with which he is regarded by all classes of radicals, political and ecclesiastical. It is worthy of remark, that the calumniators of Dr. Southey are those who clamour most loudly for liberty of thought and of expression; yet the very point and edge of their obloquy is, that this eminent person has dared to think with untrammelled freedom for himself, and thrown off, in the manhood of his mind, the prejudices of his early years. Radicalism is essentially selfish and tyrannical. The only liberty allowed by radicals to others is that of supporting their own views and flattering their own passions—the liberty of being slaves. The man who is truly independent, and takes the liberty of differing from them, becomes the object of their fear, their insults, and their vituperation.

forfeiture of civil privileges, without the loss of caste, or exposure to public dishonour. The Revolution of 1688 left the dissenters a stigmatized body. Many persons of opulence and rank, who cared little for the theological question, worshipped with them as a point of duty and a protest against insolent tyranny. They became, for a time, political dissenters. They had no quarrel with the Church but on the ground of her supposed intolerance, which in reality was that of the state; and as high-minded men, they calmly submitted to the reproach of non-conformity, that they might fight the more openly and effectually the battle of religious liberty. They have won the day.

The relative position of the parties is now essentially changed. It is no longer the point of honour to dissent. The non-conformist aristocracy have resumed their position within the pale of the Church!

Manners with fortunes—humours turn with climes,  
Tenets with books—and principles with times.

The progress of liberal opinions has led to the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts; the brand of inferiority is removed; the road to distinction and power is thrown open to all classes of his Majesty's subjects, and the dissenters have gratefully or proudly boasted that they have obtained *emancipation*! With what truth, what honour, what integrity of motive—with what regard to common sense, can the adversaries of the Establishment



continue to talk about the violated rights of conscience, the curtailment of their religious immunities, or justify their continued separation on the high and sacred ground of resistance to intolerance and hatred of persecution? Nevertheless they go on to exclaim against coercion, and to repeat again and again arguments, which, however just and forcible in by-gone days, are no longer appropriate to the altered position of the parties, and are become obsolete with the final extinction of intolerance.

It is pleasant to find, in recent attacks on the Church, long pages of declamation so entirely foreign to the practical question and the existing state of parties, that one might suppose the writers to have slept for the last century, and never to have heard of the repeal of the obnoxious Acts, nor of the celebration dinner at Freemasons' Hall. Such logic and such eloquence, admirable as they may appear when viewed in the abstract, are out of time and place when now addressed to the people of these islands; they might be transferred with advantage to Italy or to Spain, or to any other land still under the curse of "a compulsory religion." In England, in Scotland, in Ireland, it is optional with every man to avail himself of the advantages of an Establishment or to reject them. The Church of England compels no one "to come in," nor does she bar the door on her worshippers to prevent their retreat, if they like not her rites and ceremonies. The entire range of the sectarian world is open to

them, and they are at liberty to make their choice, as wisdom or folly may dictate. With no sobriety of mind can the allegation of restraining the freedom of thought or action be brought against the Church, while, with a liberality not as yet surpassed, she provides religious instruction and opportunities of worship for all the people of the land, leaving them at liberty to embrace any other system, or none!

The charge of intolerance is generally coupled with that of usurping the authority of Christ. "We protest," say the dissenters, "against all impositions, for we must not call any man master on earth; one is our master, even Christ." The same reply suffices for either case. No coercive imposition is put upon any man, and consequently no usurpation aimed at, by a society which he is always at liberty to leave, and his connexion with which is perfectly voluntary. An imposition of another kind is attempted by those who propagate so groundless a charge.

If it be alleged that the Church, while she grants liberty to separate, still decrees rites and ceremonies for those who *remain* in her communion, and pronounces dogmatically on controversies of faith; it may be replied, that in all denominations the terms of fellowship are less liberal, and the care to remove hindrances from weak consciences less scrupulous, than will be the case when the subject has been brought more fully before the public mind. In the



mean time, the objection proceeds with an ill grace from dissenters. The Church holds all that they themselves can reasonably understand by the exclusive authority of Christ in sacred things. She maintains that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation," and that "it is not lawful to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's word." If any observances are kept in use, which are not prescribed in the Scriptures, these relate to points not considered fundamental, not contravening the supremacy of Christ, but adopted in virtue of a liberty supposed to be allowed by himself. No one is coerced into submission to these human appointments. Liberty of dissent being granted, it is presumed that they who adhere to the Church exercise a liberty equally unfettered in *assenting* to the terms of conformity. The dissenters are mistaken when they suppose that all who have a political right to separate feel themselves under a moral obligation to make use of their liberty. Multitudes conform freely; they prefer the communion of the Church!

But dissenters are precisely in the same predicament; their exclusive obedience to the sovereignty of Christ is a fiction; it deceives none but themselves. It only means that, like the Church of England, they put *their own* construction on the precepts and doctrines of the Gospel, and shape their conduct by that construction. Of the mass of their people, it cannot be supposed that they examine deeply, or that they examine at all. Their

submission to Christ means nothing but submission to the leading personages of the sect they belong to, the founders of the party, or its influential members. If more than this is intended ; if it be assumed that they alone have discovered, by special illumination, the will of the Divine Lawgiver, this is a species of arrogance not very remote from the claim of infallibility. Every sect, every congregation, expects from its members a *conformity* not less strict than is exacted by the Church. Each has its conventional modes and its customary discipline, frequently unsanctioned by Divine command ; nor will they alter their plans for the accommodation of individuals, who have an equal right to plead exclusive subjection to the will and law of Christ. The subscription demanded of the clergy is not more rigidly enforced than the conformity of a dissenting minister to the faith and discipline of the people who choose him for their pastor. A confession, amounting to subscription, is demanded and given. Nor are members admitted to communion with their churches, with the exception, perhaps, of very few of the old Presbyterian societies, but on a full understanding that they accord in sentiment with those who receive them.

The complacency with which dissenters talk of "the right of private judgment," is somewhat ridiculous, when it is considered that by none are these rights less understood or more systematically violated. They are deluded by the cuckoo-like repe-



tition of the words into the persuasion that they possess the reality. The right of private judgment embraces the liberty of *individuals* to form and express their own opinions, without forfeiture of Christian fellowship, if they chance to differ from the majority. It forbids the many to decide for the few in "controversies of faith," and to excommunicate as reprobate the man who dares to think for himself. This liberty dissenters refuse; it is inconsistent with their notions of a pure communion. They have not yet proceeded, in their views of religious liberty, beyond asserting the claims of each *congregation* to be independent of foreign controul in the management of its own affairs. The rights of *individuals*—the true rights of private judgment—are held in abeyance or firmly disputed. Thus ignorant of their own principles, and in their own case mistaking words for things, it is not marvellous that they misapprehend, and then calumniate, the Church, whose theory of freedom may be more imperfect, but within whose pale there is more practical independence than is granted by the most liberal of her adversaries.

Intolerance has been common to all parties. In the present day, it is eminently characteristic of the dissenters. It appears in the unfeeling complacency with which they unchristianize, that is, doom to perdition, all who reject their peculiar dogmas—and in their avowed intention to subvert the national Church, by political influence and in-

timidation. The recent procedures of some of the body have breathed the spirit of persecution, the turbulent spirit of a secular and revolutionary faction.

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### SECTION III.

#### DEPARTURE FROM THE MODEL OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES, NOT A VALID OBJECTION TO AN ESTABLISHMENT.

The dissenters “have remarked, that in the first three and purest ages of religion, the Church was a stranger to any alliance with temporal powers: that far from needing their aid, Christianity never flourished so much as while they were combined to suppress it: and that the protection of Constantine, though not intended, diminished from its purity more than it added to its splendour.” They ask, with a tone of confidence, implying that the question carries with it the confusion and the discomfiture of the friends of the Church,—Was the Christian religion made a national establishment in the days of Christ and his Apostles? Did they effect, or did they desire, any alliance between the Church and the State?

The force of these objections rests on the assumption that there was a definite system of Church polity prescribed by apostolic law, and which was

to be the rule or model for all succeeding generations, an assumption utterly without foundation, and involving those who maintain it in insurmountable difficulties.

1. It is readily conceded, that in the apostolic age, the Christian religion was not made a national establishment; or, to express it more accurately and intelligibly, there was no national establishment for the support and propagation of Christianity. The circumstances under which this supernatural religion originated, and was made known to the world, render the supposition worse than puerile. When it is considered, that the entire civilized world, and great part of the barbarian, formed but one mighty empire under the imperial dominion of Rome; and, that the first Christians were but a handful of obscure and persecuted disciples, at first confined to the province of Judea, and afterwards, for a considerable course of years, forming but an insignificant portion of the people, thinly scattered over distant regions—how extraordinary the question—“ Was the Christian religion made a national establishment in the days of Christ and his Apostles?” Most assuredly not, while it was not as yet the religion of the empire. But, no sooner was that the case, no sooner had it superseded the Pagan worship, and become the common faith, than it was recognised by the State, and a corresponding provision made for its ministry and its worship as the religion of the throne and of the



empire. That event, however deplorable some of its results, was doubtless permitted for ends consonant with the purposes of the Divine administration, or it would have been guarded against by Divine interposition. To a reflecting mind reasons will present themselves, which may be supposed to have influenced the great Head of the Church, so to arrange the early progress of Christianity, that its march should be slow and militant—purposes more momentous than could have been secured by a more rapid series of triumphs on the one hand, or by preventing, on the other, the secular alliance with the imperial government, which was the inevitable result of antecedent events. For instance,—It was more agreeable to the genius of Christianity, that it should be left to make its way by persuasion and conviction, than by such an irresistible exhibition of miraculous power as should have established it in a day upon the ruins of Polytheism. Hence, no miracles were performed in demonstration of its truth but such as were just sufficient to substantiate its claims, and satisfy thinking men of the inspiration of its Apostles. No form of external polity, whether national or congregational, is the *end* of Christianity. Christianity is *itself* the end to which every order of means for its support is subordinate—and Christianity can exist, in the human mind, as a spiritual and holy faith, only through the medium of conviction, and a cordial love of the truth.



For such deep and practical conviction, a wise provision was made, in the majestic progress of the truth during its warfare with the prejudices and arms of the world. A solid basis was thus laid for the faith of all future ages—since there now appears to be a moral impossibility, that a religion should be false, which passed through every possible ordeal of individual examination and of public opposition, bore down by its weight of evidence the prejudices of nations, and finally ascended from the fisherman's hut on the shores of the Galilean sea, or the upper chamber of some mean dwelling in Jerusalem, to the palace and the throne of the Cæsars.

But, that it was neither possible nor desirable that national establishments should exist in the primitive ages, by no means affords a presumption that under other circumstances they must for ever be inexpedient. The alliance effected by Constantine might have warded off consequences more terrible than it produced. And, perhaps, when a more profound philosophy has been brought to bear upon the history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire, than has hitherto been applied to the elucidation of that subject, it may appear that the establishment of Christianity saved the world and the Church from a more tremendous wreck than followed.

It may not be irrelevant to remark, in passing, that in the days of our Lord, a religious establish-

ment, and that of Divine institution, existed, whose observances he kept, that he "might fulfil all righteousness." This is no rule, no model, under the present economy, but it proves that a national Church is not of necessity, and under all circumstances, an absurd or useless thing.

2. Before we infer hastily that the constitution of the primitive churches is the model for subsequent ages, it must be considered that the system of the Apostles was such as *the necessity of their circumstances* imposed on them. No formal polity was announced. As their proselytes became sufficiently numerous, they were formed into local associations for conference, prayer, and the offices of social worship. The Apostles supplied them with a few prudential maxims, regulated their simple fellowship according to the exigencies of the time, and superintended the election of their several ministers. Not a single intimation is given that their proceedings were for precedents to future generations, placed under circumstances totally dissimilar.

Had it been the intention of the Founder of the Christian Church to enforce a uniform scheme of discipline, which should be binding universally and for ever, we should have found in the New Testament the same precision, and minuteness, and declaration of positive law, as marked the institutions of Judaism. There is nothing of the kind. On the contrary, of much that was peculiar to the



ecclesiastical rule of the Apostles, we are profoundly ignorant ; and many things which we know to have been practised, were manifestly adapted to an infant cause, to an age of miracles, to communities of believers in the presence of inspired and infallible teachers. The arrangements of Providence, therefore, have decided the question of primitive order ; it is out of our power to make it a precedent. We are ignorant of its rules ; we are not in circumstances to observe them, if we were more fully instructed.

This is reluctantly conceded by a few of the most intelligent adversaries of the Church. They “do not regard any system of Church government at present existing, as of divine right.” They “much doubt whether there is any entire model, pattern, or platform in the New Testament, intended to be universally binding.” Even Mr. Hall appears to have embraced this opinion. “I perfectly agree that the old grounds of dissent are the true ones, and that our recent apologists have mixed up too much of a political cast in their reasonings upon this subject. Though I should deprecate the founding of *any established Church*, in the popular sense of that term, I think it very injudicious to lay that as the corner-stone of dissent. We have much stronger grounds in the specific corruptions of the Church of England.” This language seems to admit that an Establishment is not, as such, a criminal departure from apostolical precedent, or



there could not be a *stronger* ground of objection. That Christ prescribed no permanent scheme of polity, is becoming the avowed persuasion of most men of enlightened and comprehensive minds. The remarks of Dr. Channing are admirable and conclusive. "The great error of Milton lies in supposing that the primitive Church was meant to be a model for all ages. But can we suppose that the Church, at its birth, when it was poor, persecuted, hemmed in by Judaism and Heathenism, supplied imperfectly with written rules and records, dependent for instruction chiefly on inspired teachers, and composed of converts who had grown up and been steeped in Jewish and Heathen errors; can we imagine that in these circumstances the Church took a form which it ought to retain as sacred and unalterable, in its triumphs, and prosperity, and diffusion, and in ages of greater light and refinement? We know that in the first ages there were no ministers with salaries or edifices for public worship; Christians met in private houses, and sometimes in the obscurest they could find. On these occasions the services were not monopolized by an individual, but shared by the fraternity; nor is there a hint in the New Testament that the administration of the Lord's Supper and Baptism are confined to the minister. But in all this, we have no rule for the present day; indeed it seems to us utterly repugnant to the idea of a universal religion, intended for all ages and nations, and for all the progressive

states of society to the end of the world, to suppose, that in its infancy it established an order of worship, instruction, and discipline, which was to remain inviolable in all future times. This doctrine of an inflexible form seems to us servile, superstitious, and disparaging to Christianity. Our religion is too spiritual and inward, and cares too little about its exterior, to bind itself in this everlasting chain."

Of the rules of the primitive Church, therefore, it may be said, in numberless cases, that they are now "more honoured in the breach than in the observance." In circumstances at all similar to those of the first Christians, that is, when the Gospel is newly introduced to an unevangelized land, the new converts may be formed into local associations and congregational Churches. Under all other circumstances, the true use to be made of ancient precedent is to act in conformity to its *spirit*, that is, to acquiesce in that form or constitution of polity best suited to the times in which we live, best calculated to meet the exigencies of our age and country. On this score, we feel perfectly at ease in vindicating the claims of the Establishment to the adhesion of all intelligent and devout believers, of all right-minded and patriotic Englishmen. It is in every sense a *national* Church, according with the habits of the people, their religious preferences, their sentiments and feelings, with English law and government, the gradations of English society,



with our most cherished recollections and associations, and all the ancient institutions of our country. It is but a small minority among the lower and middle classes that can be induced to worship in a meeting-house, and to sanction the system which puts the controul of sacred things into the hands of a plebeian democracy. A minority still smaller will be found of the aristocracy and gentlemen of England. The subversion, therefore, of the Church would rob this great people of their accustomed means of religious instruction, without conciliating their affections to the psalmody or declamation of the tabernacle. It would unsettle the minds of millions, demoralize the country, and substitute disorder and infidelity for the benign influences of the most graceful institution that adorns and blesses the land.

Dissenters dwell with heavy lamentation on the corruptions that follow a departure from the primitive model, as if they had forgotten, or had never known, that, whatever that model was, it was the first to be corrupted. If, therefore, it was independency; if it was something more similar to the system of modern separatists than to that of the English Church, it was manifestly not a scheme that carried with it the principle of self-preservation; it could not secure its own perpetuity. It is vain to deny the fact, that the Church had passed through a mighty revolution before the age of Constantine, or it could not have been prepared for the



“fatal alliance.” The malignant power of the democracy was at work before the apostles were in their graves; and but a few centuries had elapsed, when, one extreme naturally generating another, the boasted sovereignty of the people, merged in the dominion of the Roman pontiff, and in the extinction of the liberties of the Christian Church! The purity of the first ages is one of the many fictions of modern times.

The congregational union, now forming in this country by the orthodox dissenters, is a practical abandonment of the theory of independent Church government. It is designed to create a power which shall correct the pernicious influence of a low democracy, without seeming directly to interfere with the professed principles of the body. They begin to discover that the original plan of the Apostles was adopted not from any other choice than that which necessity imposed. It might be the best under their circumstances; it may be the worst under ours.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Let us not be deceived by the misapplication of terms. The independency or congregationalism of modern times never had existence in the primitive ages. It was such only as might consist with the superintendent authority of the Apostles, and with the unity of “the Holy Catholic Church.” The several congregations or particular Churches were not isolated societies, but, “being many, they were one body,” under the same spiritual dominion. The Presbyterianism that succeeded the apostolic government was a modified episcopacy—might with equal propriety be termed episcopacy—and, by an easy transition, which, under existing circumstances, became inevitable, it passed into

The dissenters deduce an argument in favour of their own system, from its supposed durability as opposed to the danger and the menaced overthrow of the Establishment. The preceding remarks expose the fallacy of such reasoning.

“The Church,” say they, “is in danger, and in danger from itself.” It is *of the world*, and *therefore* the convulsions of the world alarm it.—

diocesan episcopacy. In correctness of speech, therefore, it may be asserted that the government of the Church was originally episcopal, the Apostles having been the first to exercise the functions of that sacred office. It is, however, of more consequence to observe the mild and tolerant spirit which pervaded the administration of the primitive Church, than to dispute about the precise character of those official distinctions which obtained in the ministry. Whatever was the constitution of the Church, it was not a lordship of tyranny and intolerance over “God’s heritage.” The rights of conscience were respected, though abused. The words of Gibbon, the historian, deserve to be gravely pondered by the whole Christian world. “It has been remarked, with more ingenuity than truth, that the virgin purity of the Church was never violated by schism or heresy before the reign of Trajan or Hadrian, about one hundred years after the death of Christ. We may observe, with much more propriety, that, during that period, the disciples of the Messiah were indulged in a freer latitude, both of faith and practice, than has ever been allowed in succeeding ages. As the terms of communion were insensibly narrowed, and the spiritual authority of the prevailing party was exercised with increasing severity, many of its most respectable adherents, who were called upon to renounce, were provoked to assert, their private opinions, to pursue the consequences of their mistaken principles, and openly to erect the standard of rebellion against the unity of the Church.”



*Our Church is not in danger.*" It is obvious that the words, *our Church*, as used by a dissenter, are extremely ambiguous—nor is it easy to see the point of comparison. If by "our Church" is understood the spiritual body of the faithful—that Church is composed of all good men, without distinction of external communion. If any particular Christian society is alluded to, whose stability is predicted with confidence so sanguine,—particular dissenting societies are as much exposed to decay and ruin as the national Church of England. But few of the original non-conformist congregations are now in existence—the Church has looked upon their cradle and their grave. It is not impossible that every "voluntary society," now flourishing in the metropolis, may be scattered and extinct—such is the instability of every thing merely popular and democratical—before "the long drawn aisle and fretted vault" are deserted, and the people of England shall regard with apathy, the pinnacles of Westminster Abbey, and the dome of St. Paul's, prostrate in the dust.

Or, if the term "our Church" is a misnomer for the congregational system of ecclesiastical polity as contrasted with that of a national Church, it is enough to remind the dissenters, that on their own showing, that system has heretofore given way—that the miraculous splendour of the apostolic age could not retard its early decay, and that it ended, in Popery.—That which *has* occurred may again



be repeated. The system is already condemned in this country, by the formation of the congregational union—the first step to inevitable revolutions. In America, the different denominations are growing into more condensed association, and the progress of time may transform that great republic into a monarchy, sustained and adorned by a national Church.

But, in truth, the comparison means nothing, from which to extract an argument in favour of one system or another. Independency is only an elementary system. It is the first form which a Church assumes before it is strong enough for a more perfect organization—it is that into which it may be resolved when circumstances render any other impracticable. To affirm that it is in “no danger,” is only saying, that if all existing societies, congregational or national, were crushed by the ruthless spirit of destruction which is abroad in the world—there would still be the elements and the means for the formation of a new Church, so long as there were Christians, in numbers sufficient, to meet for fellowship and worship.—Alas! to pull down, and to destroy, and to reduce all that is beautiful and majestic in social order, to its original and undisciplined elements, is the characteristic passion of these evil days.

“What a prodigy Burke was”—Lord Erskine exclaimed to Mr. Rush, the American ambassador. “He came to see me not long before he died. I

then lived on Hampstead Hill. — ‘Come, Erskine,’ said he, holding out his hand, ‘Let us forget all: I shall soon quit this stage, and wish to die in peace with every body, especially you.’ I reciprocated the sentiment, and we took a turn round the grounds.—Suddenly he stopped, an extensive prospect broke upon him. He stood, rapt in thought, gazing on the sky as the sun was setting. ‘Ah! Erskine,’ he said, pointing towards it, ‘you cannot spoil *that*, because you cannot reach it;—it would otherwise go:—yes, the firmament itself—you, and your reformers, would tear it all down.’

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#### SECTION IV.

##### THE ALLEGED INUTILITY, INEFFICIENCY, AND DANGEROUS TENDENCIES OF AN ESTABLISHMENT.

These allegations are repeated again and again, with an unsparing severity of reproach, in the writings of the dissenters, and in their daily talk. They generally begin with insinuations, that comparatively little good is done, and that the causes which operate to defeat the efforts of most holy and conscientious ministers, are to be found in the paralyzing influences of an Establishment. So infatuated are they on this point, that when great and incon-

testible good *is* done, according to their own notions of usefulness, they affirm that even the evangelical clergy cannot be thus useful, but by a sort of *miracle*—as if a miraculous interposition in their behalf, was not the highest demonstration in favour of the Church of which they are ministers.

But their criminations do not stop here. As they proceed, their imaginations darken, till they start, and recoil and tremble at the creations of their own minds. To whatever is pure and lovely, they are blinded by maddening passion, and they behold in the Church nothing but a Pandemonium, while they are ready to exclaim with Ferdinand,

Hell is empty,  
And all the devils are here !—

Much of this exaggeration is the result of ignorant prejudices, fostered by the spirit of party, and particularly by men whose lives are spent apart from liberal society, in the bosom of sectarian seclusion. In part, they may be traced to the unguarded statements of some zealous Clergymen, who, while they have freely exposed existing evils in the Church, never designed to represent these evils as incurable, nor considered them as grounds of justifiable secession. Their object has been to reform, not to destroy. Nor is it generous in the adversaries of the Church, to describe those as being engaged with themselves in a common war-



fare for her destruction, whose last thought would be to betray their trust, and who give warning of the weak points of the defence, only that they may be rendered impregnable by timely preparation.

“Dissenters first misrepresent the *end* of an Establishment, and then, with admirable logic, infer its uselessness from their own misrepresentations. “The only pretence for uniting Christianity with civil government, is the support it yields to the peace and good order of society. But this benefit will be derived from it, at least in as great a degree, without an Establishment as with it.” Whether, in this assertion, Mr. Hall meant the only *actual* or the only *reasonable* pretence, the correctness of it will be denied by every devout and intelligent Churchman. The members of the Church of England cannot but consider themselves and their cause to be the subjects of an atrocious calumny, from whatever quarter it comes,—when they are proclaimed to have no higher, no nobler, no more sacred purpose, than the maintenance of our civil polity by the sanctions of religious belief.

Without, for a moment, hiding their conviction, that it is both wise and righteous to sustain law and government by the aids of that religion which makes obedience an affair of conscience—without shrinking from the sarcastic or malignant allegation, that they secularize Christianity by bringing her mitred front into the national council, teaching the senate and the throne to bow to a majesty more

sacred than their own—without hesitating to confess that they love Christianity the better for the sake of that text, which ought to be inscribed on the walls of all our Churches—“ FEAR GOD—HONOUR THE KING.”—Churchmen have other and more solemn ends in view—to communicate to their countrymen the blessings of the Christian redemption; and so to purify their hearts and amend their morals, that they may live for ever, when the cottage of the peasant, and the palace of the noble, shall mingle their common dust, and when the meanest of the good shall ascend to glory more resplendent than that of the thrones and dominions of this fugitive world. This, in their view, is the first object of an Establishment. And it requires all the perverseness of party spirit to resist the conviction, that a more secure and abundant provision is made by the Church of England, for the religious wants of the people, than would be made, if it were left in the hands of the dissenters alone.

Hence we detect the fallacy which lurks in the proposition, that the peace and good order of society, are as well secured without an Establishment as with it. That proposition derives no support from the principle on which an attempt is made to ground it. “ Religion,” it is said, “ if it has any power, operates on the *conscience* of men. Resting solely on the belief of invisible realities, and having for its object the good and evil of eternity, it can derive no additional weight or solemnity from



human sanctions." This may be true, but it is irrelevant. The Church does not propose to rest the belief of the people on human sanctions, but on the testimony of God. Religious principles are made auxiliary to the laws, not by substituting human authority for divine, but by giving to all men the means of Christian knowledge, that all may be versed in Christian duties. The question is not, whether a religious dissenter will be less disposed to regulate his politics by his Christian principles, than a devout Churchman. The true statement, and which cannot be confuted, is this.—If an establishment provides for bringing under the dominion of religion the *consciences* of multitudes, who would otherwise live and die in savage ignorance, it does, by that means, confer a benefit on society, which would not be enjoyed without it.

After all, however, that can be said of the loyalty of Dissenters to *the law*—their attachment to the British constitution, it is to be apprehended, will endure just so long as it can defend itself from the malignant adversaries who are seeking its destruction. While it comes under the denomination of "*the powers that be*," they will not appear in open revolt. But as a body, their principles are — notoriously democratical. Nor would they regard the monarchy and the peerage with complacency, unless, stripped of the attributes of political power, they retained only a nominal existence, preserved — for a time to conceal the stealthy progress of revolu-



tion, and then to be cast off as splendid baubles, when the moment is arrived for proclaiming republican institutions. The Dissenter who, without leaning wrongfully to the royal prerogative, should discountenance the preponderance of the democracy, would instantly be regarded with coldness and suspicion by the body. To affect to discredit this statement, would be nothing less than a jesuitical fraud.

In vindicating the "*usefulness*" of the Establishment, we have no hope of producing favourable conviction in the minds of certain Dissenters. Their use of the term is extremely equivocal. It often means, the production of effects which an intelligent Churchman would think to be undesirable—by methods, from which his sobriety of judgment and delicacy of feeling would revolt. When, therefore, he knows what is meant by the allegation of *inefficiency*, he will be but little perplexed with the objection—rather, he will take it as a presumption in favour of the system, which teaches men to look more to their principles than to their feelings, and which is content to make them wise and good, without insisting indiscriminately on sudden conversions and irregular excitements, as the tests and the consummation of sincere piety. There is an immense mass of good done within the pale of the Church, and by the quiet, modest, unpretending labours of the Clergy, which in the eye of a modern Dissenter, deceived by a spurious theology, and accustomed to

empirical excitements, would present no evidences of the power of truth, no indication of the Divine blessing, nothing but the sterility of a moral desert, the portentous gloom of the valley of the shadow of death!—There are country parishes, not a few, in which, the Dissenters would affirm that the gospel was not preached—that souls were perishing for lack of knowledge—and that a melancholy field was open for the zeal and charity of the Home Missionary Society—where, notwithstanding, the Clergyman is beloved and revered by his parishioners, and justly so—since he is more effectually subserving their present and eternal interests, than if he were instructing them in the technicalities of the Calvinistic theology—substituting for sound practical truth, a luscious and adulterated exhibition of the grace of the Redeemer—and teaching men to look, for some more compendious evidences of their election and of their faith in Christ, than doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. If such procedures as those of the American revivalists are the rule of usefulness, the Church of England makes no pretence to such gross indignities offered to all that is decent, wise, venerable, and holy in religion. Nor will the members of that Church be alarmed at the charge of being useless, proceeding from persons, who think nothing done unless the people are brought to receive a theology dangerous from its near alliance to antinomianism—to substitute excitement for



principles—and to adopt a low democracy, which in reality is often a paltry oligarchy, for their form of Church government.

The inefficiency of an Establishment is argued from its want of *universality*, an undisputed attribute of the true Church. A national institution is local, and bounded by geographical lines; it cannot propagate itself beyond the limits of the nation. This is a simple truism; but it is irrelevant to the point. The Church of England makes no pretence to universality; it claims only to be a section, a particular branch, of the universal Church. But its members can spread Christianity in foreign regions, by missionaries, by catechists, by books, by biblical translations; and thus lay the foundation of institutions similar to itself, if circumstances call for their formation; or if not, churchmen have enough of the lofty and expansive spirit of their faith to rejoice, that, “nevertheless, Christ is preached!” The Church Missionary Society yields to none, in the wisdom of its plans, the zeal of its missionaries, or its liberal contribution towards “the noble army of martyrs.” Henry Martyn laboured and died in the service of this society. But the objection, like most others, recoils upon the Dissenter. Is not a Baptist, an Independent Church, local? Is it not the principle of the congregationalists that a Church is to be limited to those who can be gathered for worship in one assembly? Or, amidst the many prodigies claimed by these



sects in their exquisite self-complacency, is it possible that the same people who contend that every Christian Church is strictly congregational, should assume, for their own little fellowships, the attributes of ubiquity and universality? Rome has no miracles so miraculous as this.

If Establishments are little better than nurseries of error and of impiety, we are led to the gloomy conclusion, that Christianity itself has been an unproductive religion, a failure on the part of its Author; since, during the greater portion of the time it has existed, this divine faith has been exhibited to the human race principally through the medium of national Churches. Long before the age of Constantine, congregationalism had been merged in Presbyterianism, and Presbyterianism in Diocesan Episcopacy. Subsequent to the Reformation, the Protestant Churches, with few exceptions, have been allied with more or less strictness with the Christian governments which have renounced the papal supremacy. The inefficiency, therefore, of Establishments is synonymous with the failure of Christianity.

Nor is it unworthy of remark, that this almost hopeless view of the corruptions of our religion is, in general, held by the same class of theologians who form equally narrow conceptions of the Divine administration in regard to the human race at large.

We are not surprised that they who can represent the Deity as creating the great mass of the

human race, whether by design or inadvertence, for *inevitable* perdition, should describe the Redeemer of men as being the founder of an ecclesiastical institute, doomed by its speedy abolition to frustrate the purposes of its author. There are mysteries, profound and awful, in the ways of God. We stand amazed on the brink of an immeasurable abyss. But there is no mystery so dark as is presented by this view of the Divine government, which makes every successive step of the supreme Ruler *a failure*, and then demands that we see in it nothing but ineffable wisdom. But congregationalism was never designed for an exclusive institute. The truth is, that the errors or delusions which have marred the external polity of the Christian Church, have not availed to destroy the spiritual energies of the Gospel, and the word of truth, wheresoever and whensoever proclaimed, though mingled with human adulterations, is "the power of God unto salvation!" The noise and the nonsense of ignorant fanatics have not utterly defeated their attempts to do good. The reading of the English Liturgy has been eminently blest to the conversion of sinners and the edification of the faithful. The "living water" retains its virtue, whether presented in earthen vessels or in vases of crystal and of gold.

Establishments have transmitted the truth from age to age. "I never," said Cecil, "enter a Gothic Church without feeling myself impressed with something of this idea: within these walls has been re-



sounded, for centuries, by successive generations,  
 "THOU ART THE KING OF GLORY, O CHRIST!"

What man, that has a soul not absolutely muffled in party prejudices, does not feel the greatness of this thought and the superiority of him who gave it utterance, as contrasted with the drivelling scruples of others, who perplex their insect faculties with some indifferent ceremony or some doubtful phrase of the baptismal or burial services; and, passing by the *Te Deum* and the *Litany*, and all that bears upon it the stamp of eternal truth, exclaim of the whole system of the Church, "Away with it! It is nought!" But to the fanatic and the bigot every thing is "nought," which falls not within the compass of their own littleness.

The transition is easy from the charge of inutility to that of corruption. Of this, the great evidence is made to consist in the secularity of the clergy, who are represented without virtue; themselves infected with the grossest vices of the world, instead of holding forth to the world an example of Christian excellence. Luxurious, indolent, venal, negligent of the poor, and parasites to the great; these are the attributes of an arrogant priesthood, pampered in the splendid opulence of an Establishment; impotent to do good as ministers of the Cross, and powerful only as an army of spiritual janizaries, organized to aid the designs of a despotic administration or an arbitrary prince.

It would be injustice to the great body of the



clergy to enter formally on their defence against such criminations. It is enough to remind both their friends and their foes, that we are not living in the age of the tenth Leo, and that, in England, the days of Laud and Bonner are gone, we trust, never to return. If, however, the comparison is extorted by the adversaries of the Church, it will not be difficult to place the character of the clergy in advantageous opposition to that of the mass of dissenting ministers. But it is needless to undertake that invidious office. The calumniators of the clergy, as if conscious that the world will detect their exaggeration, seldom finish a libel on this distinguished class of men without making concessions which convict them of falsehood, or go far to blunt the edge of their attack. They confess that "among the English clergy, as splendid examples of virtue and talents might be produced as any which the annals of human nature can afford;" nor are the examples less numerous than honourable. Every system has its defects, and the characters of men will be modified by the circumstances peculiar to the system under which they live. If it be the tendency of an Establishment such as ours to produce in its ministers a lofty bearing, not always to be reconciled with the humility becoming their profession, it also affords signal opportunity for the display of the meek and lowly virtues, which never appear more beautiful, never more graceful, than when conspicuous in men who by birth are allied

to the noblest blood of the empire, and by their learning and piety are raised to the highest dignities of the Church. What, moreover, is sometimes taken for the pride of the clergy, is only a

- manly independence, fostered by the consciousness of knowledge and of virtue, the self-respect of men who do their duty without laying themselves out for a mean popularity, and who prefer the reproaches of others, wrongfully endured, to the consciousness of having made an ignoble compromise of
- principle and honour to win popular applause. This manliness of carriage can belong but to few of the
- ministers of the dissenting community. The system
- is fatal to its general cultivation. Dependent for his election to office on the suffrages of persons who are proud of a power which they are seldom qualified
- to exercise with wisdom; dependent for his daily bread on the voluntary contributions of those, who, while they are accustomed to sit in judgment on
- the preacher, boast that they can, at any time, cashier and reject the man of their choice; dependent for a favourable reception of his public services
- on a series of private attentions, which, under the imposing name of pastoral visits, are for the most part only the sacrifice of time to frivolous gossip and idle calls; the pastor of an Independent Church is
- of all men the *most dependent*; and therefore, to maintain his standing with a plebeian constituency, must be of all men the most servile. This servility is inculcated by the dignitaries of dissent, under



the abused name of Christian humility; and to cut and shuffle and creep, is perversely denominated becoming "all things to all men." But he has his revenge; he stoops to conquer. He maintains his ascendancy by arts of fanaticism, or by cherishing the passions of sectarian bigotry and hate; and surrounds himself finally with the factitious dignity and questionable influence of a partizan. The evils which result are incalculable. One, not perhaps of its greatest, is the spirit of interminable warfare against the Church; since a principal means of commanding influence within their own connection is to exasperate the malignity of faction, by feeding in vulgar minds an ignorant contempt of the clergy. The charge of being "*useless*," proceeds with an ill grace from men whose lives are spent in efforts to frustrate the labours of the clergy by calumniating their characters. But the apology of the dissenting minister is to be found in his system, if indeed any apology can be offered for the man who consoles himself for conscious servility to his own party by a corresponding insolence and ferocity towards others.

This counter-statement is given "more in sorrow than in anger;" not in the spirit of vindictive retaliation, but in mere justice to the calumniated ministers of the Church, and to the cause of truth. For, after all, dissenting ministers, generally, are good men, although placed in circumstances unfavourable to the culture of manly independence



of mind, which is perfectly distinct from party violence. And let it be recorded to their own honour, and to that of human nature, that not a few of their number fall victims to the system which they conscientiously uphold. They err in reasoning, but - their hearts are in the right place. Their souls are not rendered callous by fanaticism. They feel the - bitter mockery of such independence as is allowed them. Men of finer and more ethereal tempera-  
- ment sink under the indignities and privations they endure, in what they conceive to be the path of duty, and die broken-hearted. The real cause of their untimely departure is little understood by the people with whom they are associated. Sustained in their last hours by faith in their Redeemer, their lamented fate is ascribed to their anxious zeal too rapidly wearing out the spring of life; and their names are enrolled in the obituary of the sect, as a testimony to the goodness of that system which destroyed them.

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#### CONCLUSION.

THE preceding pages have been devoted, almost entirely, to the consideration of objections, and those the most popular, made by Dissenters to the *principle* of a religious Establishment. To defend indiscriminately "all and every thing," has been

no part of the design of the writer. Such blind idolatry would be unworthy of the Church of England, an institution which appeals not to the spirit of abject superstition, but to the reason of enlightened minds. Every impartial advocate must proceed on the assumption that many alterations will be effected in the way of reform, to maintain the truly *national* character of the Church, and that an effort will be made to conciliate all wise and moderate men, otherwise he must be aware that he may, after all, labour in vain. The peculiar and anomalous situation into which the Church is thrown, by the Catholic Emancipation Bill and by the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, makes it essential to her stability that she appear in a character and an attitude suitable to the altered position of her adversaries. Happily the question is in the hands of some of the most intelligent and devout of the clergy. When individuals like Mr. Prebendary Wodehouse come forward as petitioners for a change, their aristocratic rank, their moderation, their unquestionable piety, their patriotism in strict accordance with the purest and most devoted loyalty, must insure for their scruples and their opinions a respectful consideration. Nor, perhaps, was there ever a time when the heads of the Church were more admirably qualified to feel their responsibility, or to act with wisdom, with deliberation, and with firmness. Their task, it must be admitted, is one of great delicacy and per-



plexity. They will be pressed and thwarted from opposite quarters. Their reputation may undergo a temporary martyrdom, while they offer a manly resistance to popular clamour. But their greatest difficulty, it may be apprehended, will arise from the conscientious scruples of a large body of the most upright and honourable and religious members of the Church—some, timidly anxious lest change, however cautious, should lead on to revolution—others, unalterably attached to every thing they have been accustomed to regard as sacred. But all parties must be prepared to yield something to the imperious necessity of the times—and it is not yet too late, for intelligence and resolution, to save all that is of essential value, from the tide of destruction that is setting in with a tremendous and menacing swell.

The cause of the Church is not pleaded on narrow and exclusive principles. The various denominations who dissent, it is cheerfully conceded, may be efficient, as a secondary order of means for doing good, notwithstanding their manifold and extravagant abuses of religious liberty. But they cannot make an equally ample provision for the moral and intellectual wants of the nation. In a great empire, professing Christianity, it is now held by reflecting men of all parties, that the most happy state of things is an Establishment, with a liberal toleration of all sects, and unlimited freedom of enquiry. The overthrow of the Church, or the



subversion of the liberties of dissenters, would be alike disastrous to the religion, the social happiness, the moral grandeur,—and to that unrivalled majesty of the British empire, which has grown out of the virtue and independence of the people. The disquisition of Soame Jenyns, “on Religious Establishments,” is not obsolete, although the subject as been discussed with great power by more recent authors. And a piece by Mrs. Barbauld, entitled, “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, and on Sects and Establishments”—will never cease to be read with pleasure by those who can appreciate the most exquisite grace and beauty of style, together with views not less profound and philosophic, of the relative position of the ministers of the Church, and the pastors of certain dissenting communions. The testimony of this distinguished lady, to the expediency of an Establishment, derives weight from the consideration, that she herself lived and died out of the communion of the Church.

It is therefore to be lamented, that not a few dissenters are looking with hope to the reformed House of Commons, at this crisis, as an instrument for reducing the Church to the level of their multifarious sects. To the confiscation of ecclesiastical endowments, and the division of the spoil, they have directed an eye of eager rapacity. Happily his Majesty’s ministers have hitherto disappointed their expectations. They had miscalculated on subversion, and they are put off with reform. How

- long the truly patriotic and noble spirit of the English aristocracy will maintain its influence in the Lower House, it is not easy to predict. At present,
- the gentlemen of England have not ceased to sympathize with her nobles and her monarch—nor can they but know, that the ruin of the Church would be followed by the destruction, not long to be delayed, of all the ancient institutions of the land.
  - A turbulent democracy would tyrannise for a while—a military despotism would succeed—and the day of repentance might come too late to restore our fallen greatness. The history of nations proves that these are not the dreams of a theorist.

While so much imperfection attaches to all the institutions of man, it is the part of wisdom to be satisfied with those which have long secured to society a considerable amount of practical good. Revolutionary changes are always accompanied with hazard, their results no human sagacity can foresee, and an immense responsibility attaches to those who would put in jeopardy the institutions of a great people, in the precarious hope of substituting others more nearly approaching to theoretic perfection. Sweeping innovations may prove ruinous. The plans of the dissenters for securing a predominant interest in the Commons House of Parliament, ought therefore to be met by a counteracting vigilance. The legislature having put an interdict on the convocation of the Clergy, ought to watch with a jealous eye the proceedings of their adversaries,



who are not put under restrictions equally severe, and who can combine and act in concert, as occasions may offer, or as their policy may dictate. Let not men in power be deluded, by notions of ideal excellence, into precipitate concession to the avowed assailants of the Church. In this practical "work a' day world," the measures of the statesman must follow the discoveries of the political philosopher, "*haud passibus æquis*," or society will be thrown into sudden confusion. A system defective in theory, may work well enough in practice, especially if, invested with the attributes of a venerable antiquity, it has moulded to itself through successive ages, the tastes, the opinions, and the habits of the country. Speculative men may invent schemes of more philosophic beauty—which shall totally fail in real life, meeting with no corresponding sentiments, no lively sympathies, in the public mind. Institutions form in part the character of nations, and their efficiency is maintained by the silent opinion, the almost unconscious homage of the people, without which even law itself soon becomes a dead letter. Dissenters write as if ignorant of the history of their country, and treat with the levity of a mere speculation, a question of stupendous practical consequence. They would endanger the repose of millions for the sake of an experiment, to prove, how far a scheme that has been embraced by a particular sect, will adapt itself to the wants of a mighty empire, whose people are already rich in



ancient institutions and fixed in ancient habits. They are not aware, that the Church of England was not created by Act of Parliament—and that in the ordinary course of things, without a political convulsion, it could not be annihilated by that power. When, in this sense, they speak of it as “a parliamentary Church,” the sarcasm falls upon their own ignorance. The Parliament that should do outrage to the will of the nation, by crushing the national Church, would not long survive the work of ruin. They have yet to be informed, that our ecclesiastical system was not the production of theoretic men, nor the creation of the British government—but of circumstances, of events, of stupendous revolutions, too vast to be subjected entirely and directly to legislative controul. It exists by prescription, though modified by formal law. If it had been a mere affair of speculative wisdom, a better system might, or might not, have been originated. The men of those times were not of dwarfish intellect, nor of stunted virtues. They were giants, roused, by the voice of Heaven, to put forth their noblest energies, and they did their best. The result was the Episcopal Church of England—an institution the most complete that could be formed amidst the fierce passions and conflicting interests which sprung out of the reformation. If more had been attempted, nothing would have been accomplished—if less had been done, we should still have been left to the iron grasp of Popery.

The Church as it was constituted, with all its imperfections, became the bulwark of the liberties of the Christian world, the antagonist of the Roman usurpation, and the pledge of progressive improvements in the entire economy of human life. And here, when generation has followed generation, in long succession to the dust, this loved and hated institution stands before us in all the majesty, and but little of the decay of age. It is bequeathed to us by our fathers—its interests mingle and blend with all the dearest interests of society—its existence involves questions most important to the rights of property—its overthrow would shake the empire—and none but men of reckless minds, or baptised into the madness of revolutionary furor, or blinded by fanatical passions to all that is momentous in the stability of national institutions,—none but those who have nothing to lose, or who deserve to lose all they possess, would rashly put their hand to the work of demolition.

*Note.*—The Church Missionary Society is mentioned in a preceding page, not as the most ancient or apostolic "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts," but as that Institution, supported by Members of the Church of England, which Dissenters would most readily recognize and appreciate.

THE END.

*By the same Author.*

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